

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DUBLIN 01139 060422Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OES-07 HA-05 PA-02 ICA-20 L-03
SP-02 AID-05 IO-14 SS-15 INR-10 /096 W
-----008589 062129Z /70

R 051510Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0389
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL BELFAST

UNCLAS DUBLIN 01139

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SPOP, EI
SUBJECT: IRISH CATHOLIC CHURCH CHANGES POSITION ON
CONTRACEPTION ISSUE

1. IN WHAT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS A CLOSE-TO-REVOLUTIONARY
CHANGE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S POSITION HERE ON
FAMILY-PLANNING/CONTRACEPTION, THE IRISH BISHOP'S
CONFERENCE ISSUED A STATEMENT APRIL 4 WHICH, IN
EFFECT, WITHDRAWS THE CHURCH'S OPPOSITION TO
LEGALIZING THE SALE OF CONTRACEPTIVES IN THE
REPUBLIC.

2. THE CAREFULLY WORDED STATEMENT STRONGLY
CONDEMNS "ARTIFICIAL CONTRACEPTION" WHICH IT
STATES IS "MORALLY WRONG" AND THUS PRECLUDED FOR
CATHOLICS. HOWEVER, THE STATEMENT THEN ADDS: "IT
DOES NOT NECESSARILY FOLLOW FROM THIS THAT THE
STATE IS BOUND TO PROHIBIT THE DISTRIBUTION AND SALE
OF CONTRACEPTIVES. THERE ARE MANY THINGS WHICH THE
CATHOLIC CHURCH HOLDS TO BE MORALLY WRONG, BUT WHICH
IT HAS NEVER SUGGESTED SHOULD BE PROHIBITED BY THE
STATE."

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3. VARIOUS PROTESTANT LEADERS HAVE HAILED THE
STATEMENT AS "AN HISTORIC BREAKTHROUGH," AND INDICATED
THEIR BELIEF THAT IT ALSO PAVES THE WAY FOR REMOVING
THE CONSTITUTIONAL BAN ON DIVORCE AND INITIATING A
"MEANINGFUL DEBATE" ON IRISH POLITICAL UNITY.
METHODIST LEADER DR. HEDLEY PLUNKETT, AS REPORTED BY
THE PRESS, SAID THAT THE MOVE WOULD "HELP SHATTER THE

VIEW OF NORTHERN NON-CATHOLICS THAT THE SOUTH IS A
"PRIEST RIDDEN" STATE."

4. THE BISHOPS' MOVE WILL MAKE HEALTH MINISTER HAUGHEY'S JOB OF FRAMING LEGISLATION ON THIS SENSITIVE ISSUE, PROMISED IN THE FIANNA FAIL ELECTION MANIFESTO, MUCH EASIER. THE BISHOPS, IN THEIR STATEMENT, INSISTED THAT ANY LEGISLATION SHOULD BE RATHER RESTRICTIVE, I.E. CONTRACEPTIVE DEVICES SHOULD NOT BE MADE AVAILABLE TO UNMARRIED PERSONS. HAUGHEY IS GENERALLY EXPECTED TO HEED THIS ADMONITION, BUT MOST OBSERVORS BELIEVE THE END RESULT WILL BE A FAIRLY PERMISSIVE ARRANGEMENT ON CONTRACEPTIVES. HEALTH BOARDS WILL PRESUMABLY BE GIVEN AUTHORITY TO DISPENSE CONTRACEPTIVES TO MARRIED PERSONS, AND THE DE FACTO FREE AVAILABILITY FOR ALL COMERS FROM VARIOUS PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS WILL LIKELY CONTINUE.

5. COMMENT: THE PRIMARY MOVING FORCE IN THIS NEW CHURCH ATTITUDE ON CONTRACEPTIVES UNDOUBTEDLY COMES FROM THE NEW ALL-IRELAND PRIMATE, ARCHBISHOP O'FIAICH, WHO HAS SIGNALLED A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE IN SEVERAL INTERVIEWS. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE NEW ATTITUDE WILL HAVE ANY INFLUENCE ON THE NORTHERN UNIONISTS. RENDAHL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CATHOLICS, POLICIES, BIRTH CONTROL, FAMILY PLANNING, RELIGIOUS GROUPS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978DUBLIN01139
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780149-0632
Format: TEL
From: DUBLIN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780491/aaaaczip.tel
Line Count: 86
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c1ff7cb6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3072076
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: IRISH CATHOLIC CHURCH CHANGES POSITION ON CONTRACEPTION ISSUE
TAGS: SPOP, EI
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c1ff7cb6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014